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National Literacy Co-operation

Working for Adult Basic Education and Development

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See 21 Company Not For Gain - No: 93 04457/08

Ms Frene Ginwala

African National Congress

Dear Ms Ginwala

An open letter to all South African Political Parties: Literacy is an Essential Ingredient

for Building a Democratic and Prosperous Society

Because literacy is central to national development, we urge you to address this issue in the

final run-up to the Elections and assist us to place it high up on the national agenda.

Over 15 million South Africans are either illiterate or semi-literate. These are individuals

who cannot contribute to the economic, social and political life of our society. Many of our

most serious social problems such as unemployment, poverty, hunger, Aids, health care and general human suffering can be linked to this lack of adult basic education.

Illiterate and semi-literate people are not unintelligent people. In fact, many of them are

outstanding South Africans in their own right. The magnitude of the problem can largely be

attributed to the legacy of apartheid education and non-literate adults should not be blamed

for their educational inadequacies.

Almost half of the country's adult population cannot participate with full confidence in the

democratisation process. Many will enter voting stations this month with anxiety and fear because, among other things, they cannot read the ballot form confidently. A key national

issue is that of building a just peace in our country. However, the millions of rands spent on

promoting peace thus far will find difficulty in reaching many of these South Africans. It is

urgent that we help build confidence amongst them as they re-enter educational endeavour.

There is no doubt that the demands placed on our emerging democratic state will be enormous. It would be naive to imagine that the state will be able to address these needs single-handedly. People with skills, resources and the goodwill to address the crisis of illiteracy will be needed in their many thousands.

Illiteracy is a massive extraordinary item on the opening balance sheet of our emerging democracy. It can only be dealt with in an extraordinary manner. Unless we are able to

harness a broad range of resources from the state, business communities, the non-governmental sector, religious institutions and the full range of civil society organisations, we

will be unable to take on this major challenge successfully.

Yours in adult education and development

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Kumi Naidoo

National Director: NLC